

Good afternoon.

Two hundred and thirty-five years ago, our country was not free. Like in many other places across the world today, liberty was disrespected. Tyranny was the only government anyone alive had ever known.

But a cry of defiance came from New England. A band of patriots rose to defy a King, and the world's first democracy in more than a thousand years was born.

Freedom was won, but it was dearly bought, with the lives of thousands of idealistic and inspired young men.

Captain Nathan Hale was twenty-one years old when he died. He was a college-educated man, dedicated to the principle of liberty, and a schoolteacher full of great promise.

He fought in the Battle of New York, defending the city from British attack. And when the call went out for volunteers—to serve as a spy behind enemy lines—Nathan did not hesitate to offer himself, though he knew that the penalty if caught was certain death.

Nathan was discovered by the enemy—some say while in disguise at a bar, betrayed by a treacherous friend.

Yet in the face of a cruel execution, he did not flinch—he did not apologize for the cause he served. He had only these immortal words:

*“I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country.”*

Nathan's boldness reminds us that there is a cause greater than ourselves—that the freedoms which we cherish, that make our country great, require our own contributions for the future.

And as we gather here today, the struggle for freedom continues—in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere around the world. Nathan Hale is gone, but his spirit of defiance—his self-sacrifice, and dedication to liberty and a better life for all—lives on.

It is in that spirit that we honor today the service of all our military veterans, and the sacrifice of our many fallen heroes.

Thank you.